

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

DES MOINES RIVER BOAT ACCESS DEVELOPMENT

January 1, 2017 – December 31, 2017

Submitted by:

Iowa Department of Natural Resources
902 East Ninth Street
Des Moines, IA 50319

Prepared for:

U.S. Department of Interior
Fish and Wildlife Service
Region 3
Division of Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration
Bloomington, MN 55347-1458

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1. Purpose and Need for Action:

1.1 Purpose

The purpose is to construct one new boat ramp facility on the Des Moines River in Ledges State Park.

1.2 Need

It is the goal of the State of Iowa to provide, maintain, and improve access to navigable waters of the state. Currently there is no boat ramp facility in Ledges State Park or immediate area that provides safe and quality access to the Des Moines River for park users.

1.3 Decisions That Need to be Made

The U. S. Fish & Wildlife Service's Regional Director at Bloomington, MN will select an alternative and will determine, based on the facts and recommendations contained herein, whether this Environmental Assessment (EA) is adequate to support a Finding of No Significant Impact decision, or whether an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) will need to be prepared.

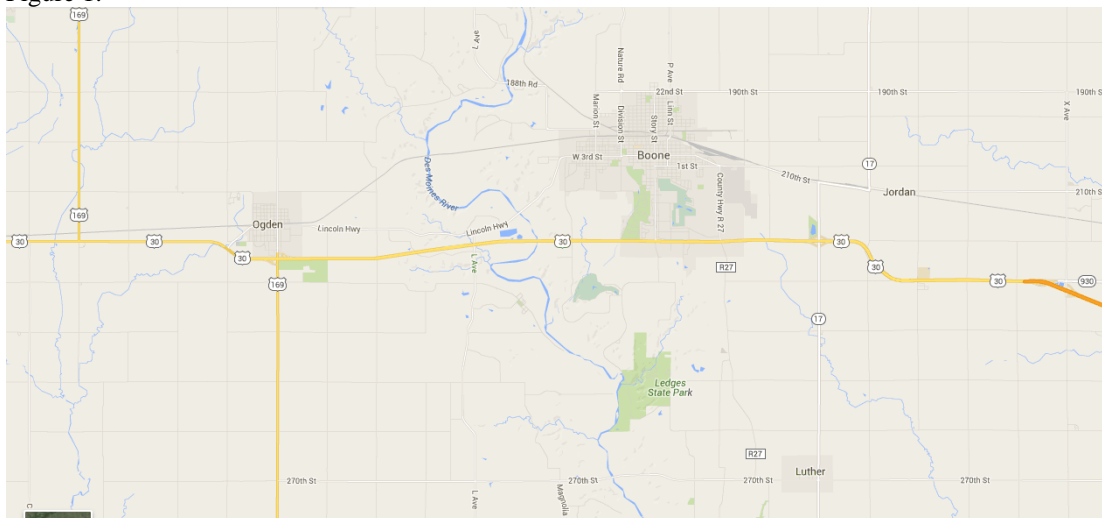
1.4 Background

In 2014 this popular park ranked sixth in the number of park visitors out of 56 Iowa state parks. The Des Moines River borders the park and provides fishing opportunities for channel catfish, walleye and flathead catfish. Currently there is no boat ramp facility in the park. There is a ramp approximately two miles downstream of the park; but this ramp is poorly located on an inside river bend. When originally constructed the ramp was located correctly but channel migration away from the ramp is why the location is now poor. Constant silting problems cause intensive maintenance issues which prohibits good boating access for much of the season. Other river ramps available to boaters include a ramp approximately 6 miles upstream and another one about 5 miles downstream of the park.

Location of Work

Ledges State Park/Des Moines River is located in central Iowa, approximately 5 miles south of Boone and in Sections 17, 18 of T83N, R26W Boone, County (Figure 1).

Figure 1.



Access Program Funding

The Sport Fish Restoration Act (SFR), as amended, currently requires that each state shall allocate 15 percent of the funds apportioned to it for the payment of up to 75 percent of the costs of acquisition, development, renovation, or improvement of facilities (and auxiliary facilities necessary to ensure the safe use of such facilities) that create, or add to, public access to the waters of the United States to improve the suitability of such waters for recreational boating purposes.

Iowa Marine Fuel Tax Fund comes from Iowa's tax on gas purchases. These funds are received annually. The monies are to be used for boating access construction, improvements and maintenance on lakes which the operation of watercraft is permissible.

Laws and Directives

Sec. 404 and 401, Clean Water Act

Section 404 and 401 permits for access development projects are required by the Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE) and Iowa's DNR Flood Plain Section if the projects meet certain thresholds for discharged dredge or fill materials into waters of the State including streams, lakes and wetlands.

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA); Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973

The project will be designed to comply with the ADA, using the Americans with Disabilities Act Architectural Guidelines (ADAAG).

With the provision of federal funds, the following laws and Presidential Executive Orders would apply, and compliance will be achieved (*see also Environmental Consequences Section*):

- Endangered Species Act
- National Historic Preservation Act
- Executive Order 11988, Floodplain Management
- Executive Order 11990, Protection of Wetlands
- Executive Order 13112, Invasive Species

Issues and Concerns

No issues or concerns were raised during a public comment period. The DNR Fisheries and Parks staff worked closely together to select a site that would not impact park visitor use. A Public Notice was published in the Des Moines Register on August 5, 2016. Emails with a draft copy of an Environmental Assess were sent to Friends of the Ledges executive committee requesting project review and any comments on how they may see the project having a positive or negative impact to the park. Friends of the Ledges are a group of dedicated volunteers who raise funds and assist the DNR in making park improvements. The public and Friends of the Ledges was given until September 2 to provide comment. No comment was received through December 28, 2016.

1.5 Duration

This Environmental Assessment is in place beginning January 1, 2017 through December 31, 2017.

2 Alternatives

2.1 Alternatives Not Considered for Analysis

A public/private partnership to provide water access was not selected as a possible alternative due to the

many issues which typically separate the two entities. Private access sites invariably include launch fees and perhaps marina services. Government processes and potential conflicts between public and private users preclude detailed analysis of this concept at this time.

2.2 Alternative A – Close the Ramp Two Miles Downstream of Ledges State Park

Alternative A is to discontinue maintenance, close and abandon the existing ramp approximately two miles downstream of Ledges State Park. This alternative was dismissed because it does not meet the DNR long term goal of providing a quality maintenance free facility for boaters recreating on the Des Moines River.

2.3 Alternative B – No Action

Alternative B is to take “No Action;” that is to continue current but minimal management efforts to remove sediment accumulated on the ramp two miles downstream of Ledges State Park.

Alternative B does not meet the DNR long term goal of providing a quality maintenance free facility for boaters recreating on the Des Moines River. Minimal resources are available for maintenance crews to continue the current level of removing accumulated sediment on the ramp. Minimal effort will result in the boat ramp not being useable during portions of the boating season. This alternative does not meet DNR long term goal of providing a quality maintenance free facility for boaters recreating on the Des Moines River.

2.4 Alternative C – Construct a New ramp facility in Ledges State Park (Proposed Action).

Alternative C is to construct a new ramp facility in Ledges State Park approximately two miles upstream of the existing ramp. This is the proposed alternative. The site has been inspected and approved by DNR Construction Services engineers as a good location for boat facility. The ramp location has access to the main river channel providing sufficient water depth for boat launching. The site for the parking area is flat. This facility site provides not only the best site for a boat facility but is best for reducing project cost. A secondary benefit will be to paddlers and tubers that enjoy the river. Regular patrols by State Park enforcement staff gives added security to users that Alternatives A and B do not have. This alternative does not have any identifiable environmental consequences. Specifically, an archaeological investigation found no cultural resources; a threatened and endangered species review determined habitats were absent for those federal species listed in Boone County, Iowa and there has been no public controversy.

2.4.1 Avoidance and Mitigation of Impact for Alternative C.

Listed Species

Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act requires every Federal agency to insure that any action it funds is not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of any listed species, or result in the destruction or adverse modification of critical habitat. Prior to approval of each Grant Agreement, a two phase consultation process is completed: Phase I involves completion of a Phase I Federal Aid Section 7 Evaluation Form for the project, and signed by the Endangered Species Coordinator and the Federal Aid Coordinator. The Phase I Form includes: 1) Identification of Federally listed, proposed, or candidate endangered or threatened species, and/or designated critical habitat that occur within the project area; 2) a project description consisting of a State review and recommendation about the effects of the proposed project on species and/or designated critical habitat occurring within the project area and; 3) documentation of the State’s recommendation, if the project is either “not likely to adversely affect”, or “likely to adversely affect” species or critical habitat. A “likely to adversely affect” designation would

indicate the need for further consultation with the Service to determine if a site specific document is necessary. If this EA is determined not to be adequate, a site specific document will be prepared or the project will be dropped from consideration. Phase II involves documentation of Fish and Wildlife Service concurrence with the State's recommendation.

Cultural Resources

An archaeological investigation was conducted at the proposed boat ramp site, drive, parking area and mobilization area. This survey determined the project would not impact cultural resource.

Indian Tribes who have requested that they be notified of Federal Aid activities within the project area will be contacted, to identify concerns that the Tribe might have about potential impacts from the project to traditional cultural properties, sacred sites, or cultural items (human remains, funerary objects, sacred objects, and objects of cultural patrimony).

Floodplain Management

Executive Order 11988 requires, to the extent possible, the avoidance of adverse impacts associated with the occupancy and modification of floodplains and to avoid direct or indirect support of floodplain development wherever there is a practicable alternative. The project site lies in Des Moines River floodplain. It is not possible to relocate the boat ramp out of the Des Moines River floodplain.

Protection of Wetlands

Executive Order 11990 requires, to the extent possible, the avoidance of adverse impacts associated with the destruction or modification of wetlands and to avoid direct or indirect support of new construction in wetlands whenever there is a practicable alternative. There is no wetland in the foot print of the project.

Invasive Species

Executive Order 13112 is to prevent the introduction of invasive species and provide for their control and to minimize the economic, ecological, and human health impacts that invasive species cause. The DNR conducts an active public awareness aquatic invasive species program to prevent the introduction of invasive species. This awareness includes published and online materials to alert boaters the dangers on AIS, billboards, steps to prevent the transport of AIS and a statewide boat inspection program. These efforts are for the purpose of controlling and minimizing the economic, ecological, and human health impacts that invasive species cause.

Environmental Justice

Executive Order 12898 is to prevent activities or developments that have an adverse effect on minorities and low income populations and communities. Construction of this boat access facility is not likely to create environmental justice problems. Low income and minority citizens will have equal access to the facility and completion of this project is expected to benefit these populations.

Public Involvement

Iowa DNR is committed to working with interested and affected parties in our efforts to provide safer and improved public water access.

A Public Notice was published in the Des Moines Register on August 5, 2016. Emails with a draft copy of an Environmental Assess was sent to Friends of the Ledges executive committee requesting project review and any comments on how they may see the project having a positive or negative impact to the park. Friends of the Ledges are a group of dedicated volunteers who raise funds and assist the DNR in making park improvements. The public and Friends of the Ledges was given until September 2 to provide comment. No comment was received through December 28, 2016.

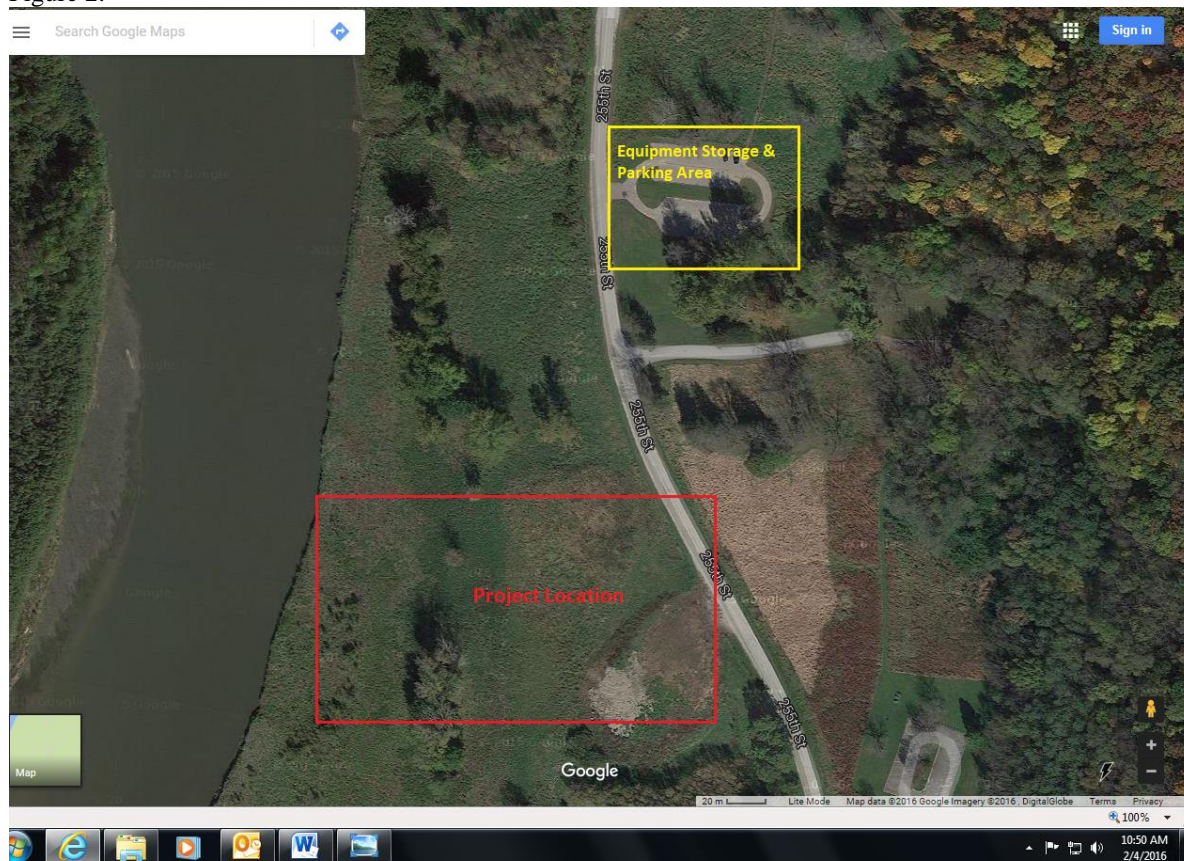
Traffic Flow and Safety

The DNR Fisheries and Parks staff worked closely together to select a site that would not impact park visitor use. This coordination effort included siting the boat ramp facility and its construction to minimize traffic flow and safety. Boater trailing boats to the park will be subject to the same traffic regulation of other park uses. The ramp, parking and drive don't transect other park amenities. This is a benefit because park users not wanting to boat will not be at risk.

3. Affected Environment:

The project's area of potential effect is shown in Figure 2. The location is confined to Ledges State Park along the Des Moines River. The potential area of effect lies in the Des Moines River flood plain. This is a grass area with a few trees that is currently being mowed by DNR Park staff.

Figure 2.



3.1 Site Selection Review

The DNR Fisheries and Parks staff worked closely together to select a site for the purpose providing quality boating access without impacting park visitor use. The ramp location has access to the main river channel providing sufficient water depth for boat launching. The site for the parking area is flat. This facility site provides not only the best site for a boat facility but is best for reducing project cost. The DNR reached out through a Public Notice and contact with Friend Ledges State Park to receive comments on the proposed site. No comments were received regarding the selected site.

3.2 Description of the Boat Access Facility after Construction

Within the area of potential effect the DNR proposes to construct a one lane ramp, approximately 1,200 linear feet of access road that connects to the boat ramp and an approximately 5,200 square feet of parking space. The parking space will serve approximately six vehicle/trailer units. An existing parking area will be used as a staging area for heavy equipment.

The site is to be developed into a public access site will likely include the following:

- Concrete access lane/parking lot
- Parking spaces for vehicle-trailer units
- Concrete launch pad
- Boarding/courtesy docks
- Stormwater controls
- Shoreline protection/riprap
- Sport Fish Restoration signage

In addition, the site will comply with ADA regulations (accessible boarding dock, slope, parking spaces, etc.)

In order to maintain the facility as safe and functional general maintenance will be performed on an annual and as needed basis. General maintenance activities may include but not limited to mowing grass in maintained areas, and erosion control structures. Infrequent activities such as upgrading/replacing docks, piers and ramps will occur when structures have deteriorated to the point of being unsafe and nonfunctional. Concrete access roads and parking lots will be repaved and striped on an as needed basis.

4. Environmental Consequences:

4.1 Alternative A. Close Ramp 2 miles downstream of Ledges State Park

Alternative A is to discontinue maintenance, close and abandon the existing ramp approximation two miles downstream of Ledges State Park. This alternative was dismissed because it does not meet the DNR long term goal of providing a quality maintenance free facility for boaters recreating on the Des Moines River.

4.1.1 Avoidance and mitigation of Impacts for Alternative A

Listed Species

Closing and abandon the existing ramp downstream of Ledges State Park has no impact to listed species. The ramp and parking area will remain but repairs and maintenance activities will cease.

Cultural Resources

Closing and abandoning the existing ramp downstream of Ledges State Park has no impact to cultural resources. The ramp and parking area will remain but repairs and maintenance activities will cease.

Floodplain Management

Closing and abandoning the existing ramp downstream of Ledges State Park has no impact to floodplain management. The ramp and parking area will remain but repairs and maintenance activities will cease.

Protection of Wetlands

Closing and abandoning the existing ramp downstream of Ledges State Park has no impact to wetlands.

No wetlands are present at this developed site.

Invasive Species

Closing and abandoning the existing ramp downstream of Ledges State Park should minimize the introduction of invasive species to the Des Moines River.

Environmental Justice

Closing and abandoning the existing ramp downstream of Ledges State Park may impact environmental justice. This action will equally impact all user groups.

Public Involvement

Iowa DNR is committed to working with interested and affected parties in our efforts to provide safer and improved public water access.

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Traffic Flow and Safety

Closing and abandoning the existing ramp downstream of Ledges State Park will have no impact to traffic flow and safety.

4.1.2 Cumulative Impacts

Closing and abandoning the existing ramp downstream of Ledges State Park will have no cumulative impact. This is a signal action other ramp facility closures are not planned at this time.

4.2 Alternative B - No Action

This alternative continues current but minimal management efforts to remove accumulated sediment on the ramp located two miles downstream of Ledges State Park. This minimal effort will result in an unusable boat ramp during portions of the boating season. This alternative will lead boaters to use other area boating facilities or abandon boating recreation on the Des Moines River all together.

4.2.1 Avoidance and mitigation of Impacts for Alternative B

Listed Species

Continuing current but minimal management efforts at the existing ramp downstream of Ledges State Park has no impact to listed species.

Cultural Resources

Continuing current but minimal management efforts at the existing ramp downstream of Ledges State Park will not impact cultural resources.

Floodplain Management

Continuing current but minimal management efforts at the existing ramp downstream of Ledges State Park has no impact on floodplain management.

Protection of Wetlands

Continuing current but minimal management efforts at this ramp has no impact on wetlands.

Invasive Species

Continuing current but minimal management efforts at this ramp may minimize the introduction of invasive species to the Des Moines River. The ramp and parking area use is expected to be much reduced which will minimize the likelihood of invasive species introduction.

Environmental Justice

Continuing current but minimal management efforts at this ramp may impact environmental justice. The ramp and parking area will remain open but use is expected to be much reduced. This action will equally impact all user groups.

Public Involvement

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Traffic Flow and Safety

Continuing current but minimal management efforts at this ramp will have no impact to traffic flow and safety.

4.2.2 Cumulative Impacts

Continuing current but minimal management efforts at this ramp will have no cumulative impact. This is a signal action other ramp facility will be maintained and repaired according to current management activities.

4.3 Alternative C – Construct a New ramp facility in Ledges State Park (Proposed Action).

Alternative C is the proposed action. The site has been inspected and approved by DNR Construction Services engineers as a good location for boat facility. The ramp location has access to the main river channel providing sufficient water depth for boat launching. The site for the parking area is flat. This facility site provides not only the best site for a boat facility but is best for reducing project cost. A secondary benefit will be to paddlers and tubers that enjoy the river. Regular patrols by State Park enforcement staff gives added security to users that Alternatives A and B do not have. This alternative does not have any identifiable adverse environmental consequences. Specifically, an archaeological investigation found no cultural resources; a threatened and endangered species determined habitats were absent for those federal species listed in Boone County, Iowa and there is no public controversy.

4.3.1 Impacts for Alternative C

Listed Species

Listed species considerations are reviewed and a Fish and Wildlife Service Phase 1 Section 7 was

completed. The determination made by the Iowa Endangered Species Coordinator is that this action has no effect to listed species or critical habitat.

Cultural Resources

A phase 1 cultural resource investigation was conducted on the area of potential effect. No cultural resources were found and the Archaeological Consultant recommended that the project be completed. There was no tribal consultation since the investigation found no cultural resources and the footprint of the project is small in size. The Iowa DNR completed a NEPA Compliance Checklist and determined the development of this proposed boat access facility will not impact cultural resources.

Floodplain Management

This access facility is located in the Des Moines River floodplains, and there is no practicable alternative to its location in the floodplain. Regulations and permit requirements will continue to dictate the avoidance of adverse impacts associated with the occupancy and modification of the floodplain and to avoid direct or indirect support of floodplain development wherever there is a practicable alternative. Access construction involving modification to the Des Moines River floodplain is designed to avoid or minimize impacts to Ledges State Park. Access design is certified as “no rise” by the engineers charged with facility design so that no increase in flood peak is caused by the access development.

Protection of Wetlands

Regulations and permitting requirements also assure the avoidance of adverse impacts associated with the destruction or modification of wetlands and to avoid direct or indirect support of new construction in wetlands whenever there is a practicable alternative. No wetland has been identified in the area of potential effect.

Invasive Species

Introduction of invasive species, and provisions for their control, focus on minimizing the economic, ecological, and human health impacts that invasive species cause. The State continues efforts to minimize the chance of introductions that would have detrimental impacts through public education and facility design considerations.

Environmental justice

Construction of this boat access facility is not likely to have an adverse effect on minorities and low income populations and communities.

Public Involvement

Iowa DNR is committed to working with interested and affected parties in our efforts to provide safer and improved public water access.

A Public Notice was published in the Des Moines Register on August 5, 2016. Emails with a draft copy of an Environmental Assess, not this draft, were sent to Friends of the Ledges executive committee requesting project review and any comments on how they may see the project having a positive or negative impact to the park. Friends of the Ledges are a group of dedicated volunteers who raise funds and assist the DNR in making park improvements. The public and Friends of the Ledges was given until September 2 to provide comment. No comment was received through December 28, 2016.

Traffic Flow and Safety

This access development is located on an improved high use roadway. Consideration was also given to addressing any issues associated with a major increase in traffic, both land and water based.

4.2.3 Cumulative Impacts

The boat access facility is a single proposal. Multiple facilities similar to this access site are not being proposed at this time.

5.1 List of Preparers:

Martin Konrad, Executive Officer
Iowa DNR
Wallace State Office Building
502 E. 9th Street
Des Moines, IA. 50319

Ann Schneider
Fish and Wildlife Biologist
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
5600 American Blvd. West, Suite 990
Bloomington, MN 55437

6. Consultation and coordination

This EA was prepared in consultation and coordination with the USFWS Region 3 Division of Federal Aid and the USFWS Region 3 Regional Environmental Coordinator

Program field staff, on a routine basis, consults and coordinate with a vast network of government officials, fishing clubs, sportsmen's clubs, and the public at large as they plan and implement access site development

In addition, the Iowa DNR works closely with agencies of the federal government such as the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to help plan and provide access development as efficiently and wisely as possible.

Martin Konrad, Project Manager
Iowa DNR
502 East 9th Street
Des Moines, IA 50319